

The dictator has gone but the destruction of the dictatorship is not yet complete

Dave Stockton Thu, 20/01/2011 - 15:52

Dave Stockton

It is now quite plain that the flight of Tunisian dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali represented a preventive coup from above, organised by top figures in the old regime around Ali's incumbent Prime Minister Mohamed Ghannouchi and interim President Fouad Mebazaa, determined to save their regime.

Even this was forced on them by an unstoppable mass street mobilisations and the threat of a general strike from the Tunisian General Labour Union or UGTT (Union générale tunisienne du travail).

The unions ? due to pressure from the rank and file ? played a large role in the events of the last few days. The top leaders were totally complicit in the Ben Ali regime, fawning on the dictator, but over the past period some local and regional leaders and rank and file forces pushed the union into action. Initially too the UGTT leaders said they would join the cabinet of the national Ghannouchi unity government but again their hand was forced by massive demonstrations in Tunis, in the working class industrial district of Sfax, in Tataouine, in Sidi Bouzid, in Regueb, in Kasserine and in other cities where the movement has grown in strength since 17 December. The UGTT withdrew recognition from the new government and the three ministers it had put forward to serve in a cabinet.

The protesters' message was clear ? they were brandishing placards, which read, "The CRD must go!" The CRD (Democratic Constitutional Rally) is the party of Ben Ali. One protester told Reuters' news agency "We don't want this revolution to come from this criminal party". Ines Mawdud, a 22-year-old student among protesters at the demonstration added; "I am afraid that our revolution will be stolen from me and my people. The people are asking for freedoms and this new government is not. They are the ones who oppressed the people for 22 years"

In the capital, another demonstration was lead by the head of the banned Islamist movement Ennhada, Sadok Chourou. He too said: "The new government does not represent the people and must fall. CRD No!"

The manoeuvres of Ghannouchi and Co. prove that it is easier to get rid of an individual dictator than to dismantle a dictatorial regime. The army is now in effective control of Tunisia. Since the police are always in the frontline of repression ? the army held in reserve and presented as the guardians of the nation ? it is always easy to generate illusions when the army steps in to remove a hated tyrant. A state of emergency and a curfew still remains in force. Though portrayed as the ally of the people, it is there to ensure that Tunisia's rich bourgeoisie is safeguarded against the threat from below. In Tunis, paramilitary riot police still fired tear gas and beat protesters in the centre of the capital. This also confirms that the regime itself has not yet been overthrown.

The latest news that the interim president and prime minister have resigned from the CRD is yet another move to disguise his attempts to preserve the regime. Reports are growing that Ben Ali and his wife, Leila

Trabelsi, left with an amazing amount of money, an estimated £37.5m (\$60m), taken from the Bank of Tunisia in gold ingots. It also appears that they and other members of the CRD elite have vast sums stashed away in French banks and in real estate. The French working class must demand this is impounded and handed over to any democratically elected representatives of the Tunisian people.

The strategy of the old CRD regime is to keep a tight grip on the key instruments of repression - the police and the army whilst sacrificing the Ben Ali clique and maybe the party too, allowing a strictly limited relaxation of repression (beatings and tear gas rather than live rounds). Their hope is that the mass anger and mobilizations will eventually dissipate and allow them to put in place a series of measures to enable them to survive the upcoming elections by co-opting some oppositionists and changing their party labels.

What will be crucial in the coming weeks is to drive all the elements of the old regime from power and lay the basis for free elections to a sovereign and revolutionary Constituent Assembly. Sovereign in that there must be no preconditions or reserved power for the army or the state bureaucracy let alone the capitalists and the landowners. Democratically elected local organs of the workers and the youth must oversee the elections and a popular militia guard to them, the media must be open to all and must cover mass meetings of the electors.

But in this process the working class and youth must maintain and extend their leadership of the revolution. To do this they need to transform their old organisations (the trade unions) and build new ones (workplace committees and workers' councils). The working class rank and file must kick out the top leadership of the trade unions, corrupted by years of subservience to Ben Ali. Already there have been rank and file forces reported and local leaderships have played a major role in the movement.

The unemployed youth and the students, the teachers and the young lawyers who all played a heroic role in the movement need to link up with the worker militants in the factories. Local councils of delegates elected in the workplaces, the schools and colleges, workers districts and the bidonvilles (shantytowns of the poor).

Last but not least they need to form a revolutionary party, determined not just to drive the ruling clique from power but also to smash the dictatorial regime and put the workers in power.

Key immediate objectives of its programme must aim at destroying the entire repressive regime which is still functioning on the streets and in the police stations and barracks and. Such demands should include:

- ? the ruling party must be dissolved, its militia disarmed, its property confiscated and its officials and ministers brought to book for their corruption.
- ? the police chiefs and torturers responsible for the regime's repression must be arrested and their crimes exposed.
- ? the secret police and the paramilitary squads must be disarmed and disbanded, a workers and youth militia must keep order, democratic rights extended to the soldiers (election of soldiers committees) so that they cannot be used again as blind tools of coups and dictatorship.
- ? all political prisoners must be released and all exiles given the right to return
- ? there must be complete freedom to form political parties, to demonstrate, to meet, to have unfettered access to the broadcast media and to publish newspapers. Above all access, to the media of workers and youth who led the uprising
- ? there must be an immediate mass distribution of food and other essentials to the poor
- ? there must be a sliding scale of wages and income for the unemployed to combat inflation.
- ? the unemployed must be enrolled in for a programme of socially valuable public works to replace the bidonvilles with decent housing, schools, clinics, etc

? the elections must take place under the control and protection of workers and popular committees and militia of a sovereign and revolutionary constituent assembly

? there must be active support for popular uprisings and revolutions against the ruling tyrants in all the countries of North Africa and the Middle East ? a declaration of solidarity with the Palestinians and against the blockade of Gaza.

But if the revolution develops so that the regime is brought crashing down- if power is really in the hands of the streets then the question is posed: which class shall take the power?

In any prolonged impasse between the remnants of the old regime clinging to power and the streets there is the danger that the army might intervene. The head of the army, General Rachid Ammar appears to have been a key figure in 'persuading' Ben Ali to go.

As long as the revolutionary ferment lasts the army high command would probably hesitate about any sort of coup which was a grab for power.

The bourgeois opposition figures played no leading role in events so far but are now ready to sweep up the spoils in presidential elections. Some are for compromise with the old regime and are fearful of the masses.

One such figure is Ahmed Bouazzi, a leader of the Progressive Democratic Party. He said, "We have three possibilities. The first is the complete chaos of Somalia; the second is a military coup after a saviour comes to rescue us from the chaos and lasts for 23 years. The third possibility is working with the people who are in charge of the state right now to prepare fair elections."

A more intransigent opposition voice is that of Dr Moncef Marzouki of the Congress for the Republic (CPR) who returned from exile in France, declaring he intended to run in the presidential elections for this party. He has a background as a champion of human rights.

He sharply attacked the national unity government, saying "It is the continuation of the dictatorship. The RCD is a parasite. They exploited the apparatus of the state."

But, he added, "When we take them away, the state will function much better. Luckily, in Tunisia we have a great bureaucracy that can run the state."

In fact this comment shows that, though some media describe him as a leftist, Marzouki and the CPR are bourgeois liberals.

The Tunisian Workers' Communist Party (PCOT) is a Marxist-Leninist Hoxha-ite party founded in 1986, with a youth wing the Union of Communist Youth of Tunisia (UJCT). Its militants have operated underground for many years and appear to be the best-known communist grouping. Its leader Hama Hammami, has lived in exile in France for years but has now returned. But PCOT's programme is the typical Stalinist stages one ? first bourgeois democracy and later socialism. In its nine point programme for the revolution it states:

?The democratic change, with its political, economical, social and cultural dimensions, requires the real end of the repressive regime by taking direct steps which consist of forming a provisional government or any other body that has executive powers and undertakes the task of organizing free election for a Constitutional Assembly which would establish the bases of a real democratic republic in which people would enjoy freedom, social equality and national dignity.?

This stages strategy with its accompanying popular front of unity between the classes will lead to disaster

for the Tunisian workers and youth. It will leave power in the hands of the rich ? who put Ben Alai and his predecessors in power and supported their crimes. It will mean the resources of the country continue to be pocketed by these parasites, It will mean that the process of privatisation under the aegis of the IMF, the US, France etc, will continue to subordinate and super-exploit the country's natural wealth and its labour force. The alternative is a workers and peasants government, based on democratic councils which can take over the large scale units of the economy and plan their development. This is Trotsky's strategy of permanent revolution. Another aspect of this strategy is to spread the revolution to the surrounding countries. They are already dry tinder to a democratic revolution that grows over into a socialist revolution.

The Tunisian intifada was undoubtedly related to the struggles of youth and workers in Europe and the middle east ? now difficult to conceal given the increasing number of satellite TV channels, the internet, facebook etc. Of course a revolution cannot be made on facebook or twitter but the new media can aid it. Across the entire region the dictators are quaking in their boots. None more so than Libyan dictator Muammar al-Gaddafi. His fright is testified too by his indignation over Ben Ali's overthrow. On January 16, Gaddafi spoke to the Tunisian people on state television:

"You have suffered a great loss. There is none better than Zine to govern Tunisia. Tunisia, a developed country that is a tourist destination, is becoming prey to hooded gangs, to thefts and fire - chaos with no end in sight. I am concerned for the people of Tunisia, whose sons are dying each day. And for what? In order for someone to become president instead of Ben Ali? I do not know these new people, but we all knew Ben Ali and the transformation that was achieved in Tunisia. Why are you destroying all of that?"

The fear of Gaddafi, the regime in Egypt and the Zionists in Israel is palpable. What they fear is the revolution - they fear an end to their barabric rule.

Source URL: <https://fifthinternational.org/content/dictator-has-gone-destruction-dictatorship-not-yet-complete>